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THREE CASES: THE THIRTEENTH CASE

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Cincinnati, Ohio

(Continued from page 234 of the January Journal)

Up to that time we had maintained the arrangement that had obtained all Spen's little life, of placing his bed beside Jenifer's in the room adjoining. As I was with him all day and there was practically nothing to do at night, there seemed no sense or reason for altering his habits, although I knew that unless his condition improved, there would come a time when constant, skilled vigilance would be needed. I had every confidence in Jenifer, although I had never been able to absolutely overcome a vague dislike.

She was of unmixed rustic origin, big boned, somewhat primitive in mind, but under Mrs. Harm's training and supervision, every fibre of her had been moulded into the perfect type of handmaid that the service of the Vamplews demanded. This task had been rendered colossal for the housekeeper, by the fact that the new mistress of the house and the new maid came from the same locality and were not unacquainted with each other. To subdue this equality in both parties had been one of Mrs. Harm's ordeals in her master's early married life, and it was little Spen's arrival that dissolved the difficulty by providing Jenifer with a definite status and limitations.

"She is certainly a model in the nursery," I admitted, "and the child does more for her than anyone else; I don't feel I'm doing a thing."

Mrs. Harms looked at me sympathetically. "Don't fret, Miss Penley, my dear. Everyone knows you're doing your best, and Mr. Vamplew often speaks of it; but there are some things we humans just can't do, and controlling life and death is one of them."

"I suppose you're right," I assented grudgingly, "but it seems all wrong to just let him go without being able to put up any fight."

"I certainly dread it for Mr. Vamplew's sake," she said; "Master Spen is his very life."

"At least the child's mother was spared such a loss."

Mrs. Harms looked at me across the table.

"Do you know," she said curtly, "I sometimes wonder if it is she who is taking him away from us!"

I set down my cup suddenly. "Why, what do you mean,—how could she?"

Mrs. Harms looked confused, "Oh, I don't know, my dear, only my mistress grew terribly jealous of the fact that the baby had a place in his father's heart and among the Vamplews that she, with all her beauty, could not hold."

It was the first time Mrs. Harms had ever openly alluded to Mrs. Vamplew's social inequality, and in this connection it showed in a new light. She would talk no more, but long after I had gone to my room that night it gave me food for desperate thought. To be a thing apart from a man and his house, even if married to him, was one thing, but to have the child of one's body arrayed in that alien circle, was another. To her husband Mrs. Vamplew's death meant possibly relief, but to take away his son would be to take away everything in life. This was reasonable, but I decided that it could hardly admit of any application to our present problem.

The room in which I slept was almost a corridor's length from my little patient, and as I did not retire early, I paid a final visit before I got into bed, and then not again till daylight. Being a good sleeper it was a rare thing for me to waken during the intervening hours, and when one night I roused to full consciousness for no apparent reason, the strangeness of it was disturbing. There was a faint moonlight by which the objects about me were dimly discernible. Absolute silence prevailed, and with a sudden and desperate desire for companionship, I got out of bed and wrapping a kimono round me, I slipped out into the dark corridor and started along to Jenifer's room.

I had traversed about half the length, when I was amazed to hear little Spen talking with a strength and volubility of which I did not conceive him to be equal. Believing that he spoke to Jenifer and afraid that I might serve to distract him, I advanced gingerly until I almost gained the threshold of the partially open door. The night-light glimmered faintly through the crack and standing there I waited for the assurance of Jenifer's voice, but to my growing uneasiness she made no response. Common sense told me that it might be the delirium of inanition that had developed in the child, but a fear that refused to be subdued by reason was fast laying hold of me. Forcing myself to proceed rationally, I advanced till I had crossed the threshold, where I stood rooted. So dim was the tiny light that it barely served to more than create shadows of which the room seemed full, but I saw Jenifer stretched across her bed fully dressed and apparently profoundly asleep for she breathed heavily.

Little Spen afforded the ghastliest spectacle I have ever confronted, sitting bolt upright, little more than a skeleton, his great hollow eyes apparently fixed on empty space and with much solemnity carrying on a meaningless conversation with thin air! It was the

certainty that this was not delirium that petrified my limbs and voice, and then to crown my terror the night light went out. That it was not extinguished by any ordinary agency, I was sure and as the darkness fell on us Spen's little voice broke in a weak and piteous wave of entreaty.

It was anxiety for him that restored me to my senses and in a few minutes I had recovered the balance I so badly needed. Whatever strength it was that had animated him momentarily, it left him weaker than ever, but for some reason I refrained from rousing Jenifer, and after doing everything I could for him, I sat by his side till the day broke, when I crept to my room.

I confided to no one in the house, but on Dr. Bleet's arrival I had a long talk with him. Poor old thing, if it hadn't been so serious it would have been funny. He has gotten everything so nicely encompassed by the elements that are contained in a milk bottle, that it took quite a little mental adjustment; but he expanded valiantly, and said I'd done admirably not to rouse the house. His first instinct was to call in a psychologist for a consultation, then we decided that any visible change might divert the course of things and, as we really didn't know what we were looking for, he asked me if I thought I had courage to try it again alone. I told him I had courage for anything that seemed like helping us.

With evening my vigil assumed more disturbing proportions, and as night's army of terrors and dangers one by one took the place of the cheerful security of the day, I wished with all my heart that I had consented to share the ordeal. Pulling myself together, I made my accustomed visit to Jenifer's room where she was making the ordinary preparations for the night, little Spen to all appearances lying asleep. Leaving them I returned to my room, and sat on my bed, fully dressed, to wait.

The clock had struck twelve when I heard her strike a match and then switch off the light. Waiting about fifteen minutes, I crept along as quietly as I could and listened. What seemed endless silence was broken by Spen asking something, and Jenifer answering soothingly, "Wait a minute, Honey, and mother will come and talk to you."

It must have been the actuality of her voice that kept me from fear, and enabled me to witness what followed from my post by the door. While I have never attended a spiritualistic seance, something told me that Jenifer's subsequent actions were those of a medium. Fully dressed, she sat down and gazed into space, then a series of contortions shook her body, and her breath came slowly and with effort; finally she fell across the bed in a deep sleep. Summoning all my courage I advanced to where I could see more satisfactorily and,

as I moved to command a full view of Spen's little bed, I saw the white curtains move gently. The child raised on his elbow and finally sat up clutching the old slipper, and while I neither saw nor heard anyone, it was unquestionably certain that he did, and that he had done so many times.

My first instinct was to have my evidence clinched by a second witness and, as all my fear was subservient to the momentousness of this discovery, I slipped out of the room and back along the corridor. Another shock awaited me in finding a bright light at the end, and Mr. Vamplew and Dr. Bleets on the top step of the big staircase. I suppose I looked white, as they made me sit down before I spoke, and I was so glad to see them it was a few seconds before I could control my voice.

"We appreciated your courage," Mr. Vamplew explained, "but to expect you to carry the entire ordeal, was neither advisable nor necessary, and we decided to be here in case you needed us."

So the three of us crept back and Mr. Vamplew's face was very tragic, as one thing after another corroborated the gravity of the situation. Of course, he roused Jenifer, which was no easy task, and I think she saw at once that her only chance was a free and full confession. She had always been mediumistic, she said, but had never made use of her gifts except at funerals and when, as a girl, spirits both wrote and spoke through her. It was her keen sympathy with her late mistress which made her put herself at the dead woman's service. That ultimately Mrs. Vamplew meant to take her child, we did not have to be told,—it was a terribly grim recital there in the dead of night, I tell you.

Before morning, with Mrs. Harm's help, little Spen and all his belongings were out of that fateful room, and Jenifer Prudden off the premises.

Then our fight began in earnest, but oh, such a different affair. Every day a little gain, till now he is rosy and normal.

"Bleets certainly ought to give you a testimonial for saving his reputation and adding another formula to his repertory," I said.

Mary chuckled. "Don't you believe it! I just feel that he's incubating a paper on, "How a Protracted Caloric Deficiency Can Result in Hallucination in Children!"